



MEDIA RELEASE

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SKYROCKETING NUMBERS: TERRITORIANS PLACED AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS DUE TO INACTION ON HOUSING

Data published today demonstrates the need for immediate and concerted action to address an unacceptable rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, according to housing and homelessness peak body NT Shelter.

Executive Officer Peter McMillan said that he was alarmed by the continued rise in the number of people presenting for homelessness services across the Northern Territory but not overly surprised because the NT Government lacked a plan to tackle an ongoing and increasingly severe housing shortage.

The latest annual report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on specialist homelessness services reveals that the Northern Territory continues to buck the national trend of fewer people presenting for housing and other assistance, with a rise of 7% in the Territory compared to 1.5% fall elsewhere. The increase in clients was driven by a staggering rise in young people presenting alone (up 63% in the past two years) and further growth in Aboriginal persons presenting to homelessness services (up 16% for the same period).

“The inadequate supply of safe and secure housing is causing a greater number of people to be put at risk of homelessness and is a problem that is continuing to worsen. Over the past two years alone we have seen a 22% rise in the number of urban public housing applications but we have 47 fewer houses now than we did four years ago. Of most concern is the lack of any plan to address the problem. It’s hardly surprising then that we’re seeing the numbers of people seeking help, and particularly young people, continuing to skyrocket”, said Mr McMillan.

The final report of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission singled out the development of safe and affordable housing as playing a “crucial role” in achieving economic goals.

Mr McMillan said that while other states and territories had launched major investment programs in public housing supply, taking advantage of low interest rates to stimulate their economies through COVID, the Northern Territory government was investing less in public housing than it had previously committed.



“In what’s pretty much an insult to public housing tenants and those on wait lists for up to 8 years, our Government here “reprioritised” \$20 million of unspent money earmarked for new public housing builds and renovations by transferring those funds to its Home Improvement Scheme, with little likelihood of that cash coming back any time soon”, Mr McMillan said.

“We strongly support the \$1.6 billion spend over ten years for remote housing. But what about the estimated 5,000 house shortfall in our urban communities? The Territory Government must get to work to attract the necessary cash from other sources if it doesn’t have sufficient cash of its own. It’s their responsibility.”

Mr McMillan said that while the latest homelessness statistics were “very confronting” and presented “a truly horrible picture and ongoing trend”, there were things that could be done to start to get on top of the situation.

“We can turn our form on homelessness around by getting started on an adequately funded housing and homelessness plan and taking action immediately. Territory Government officials must sit down with their counterparts in Canberra to get a fairer deal for the NT on housing and homelessness. A total of \$19 million from Canberra out of \$1.6 Billion to all states and territories is unforgivable and utterly unacceptable given the scale of our challenges here. Continued failure to address this is forcing more and more Territorians each year into the harsh reality of life without a home”.

“Frankly, we’re growing tired of NT homelessness statistics continuing to deteriorate while other states are seeing their numbers come down. The results others are getting don’t happen by magic. Effort, commitment and investment is required. At the moment the issue here is getting insufficient attention, too little action, and a paltry amount of funding, especially from the Commonwealth Government”, said Mr McMillan.

“This is a test of leadership and an opportunity for a genuine partnership between government, industry and non-government leaders to come together and tackle our housing challenges, identifying how we will attract the cash that’s required to get houses built across the Territory where they’re needed.”

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